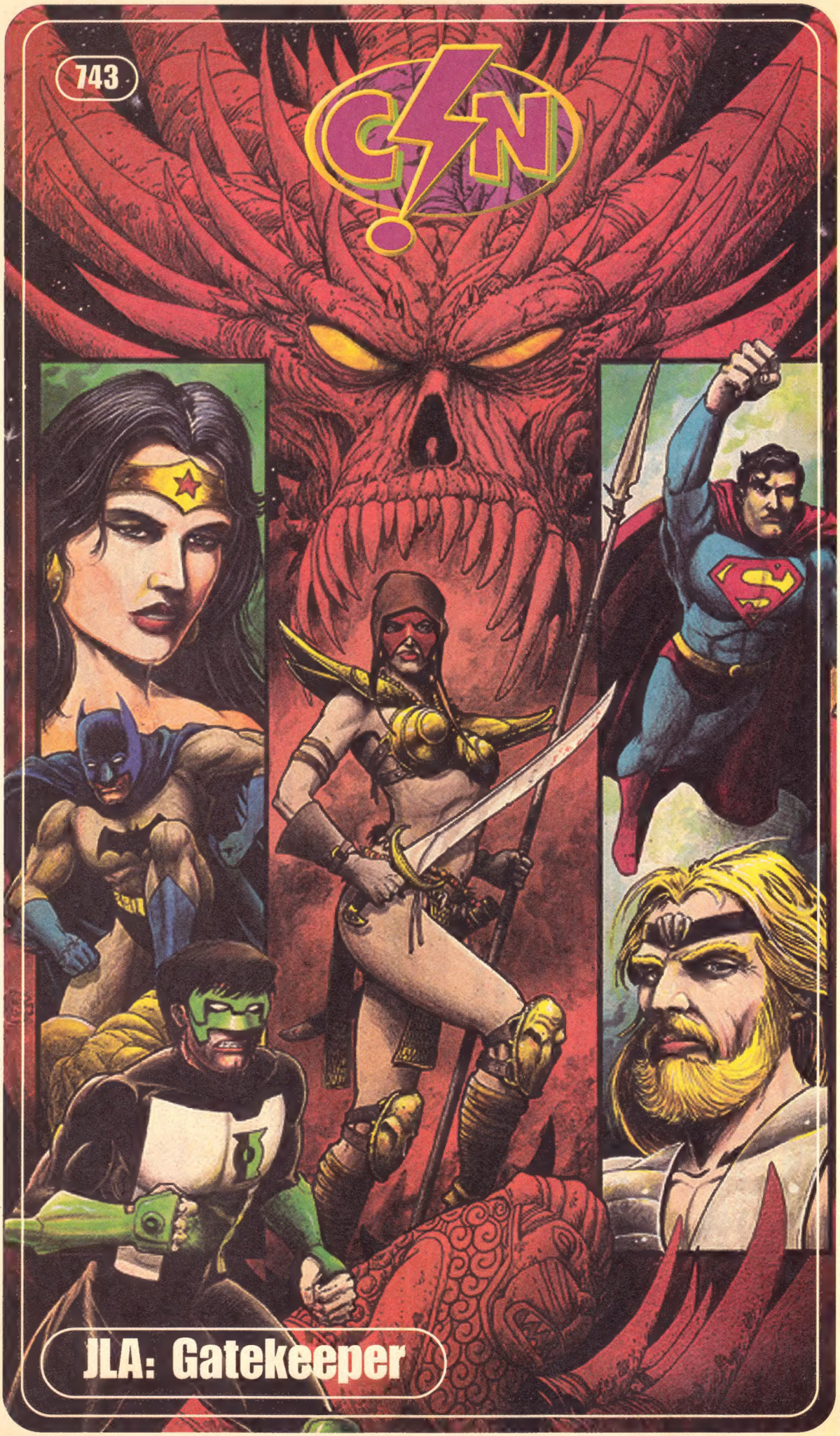
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JLA: Gatekeeper

# Crashing the Gates

What level of responsibility does a hero bear for the fate of another? That's a question that's weighed heavily on Kyle Rayner's mind since last year's *Green Lantern Annual #9*.

When Kyle Rayner and a new superhero named Sala—a new incarnation of the Babylonian deity Istar—fought against a diabolical pantheon whose roots date back to the ancient Sumeria of Gilgamesh, the results were much less successful than Green Lantern had hoped. Oh, the duo managed to stop the evil forces... but in the process, Sala became a prisoner of the Babylonian underworld, waiting for the day when Green Lantern could come to her rescue.

That day is about to arrive... but rather than going it alone, Green Lantern has enlisted the aid of some powerful friends to ensure the success of his mission.

***JLA: Gatekeeper***, a three-issue prestige-format miniseries written and illustrated by *Tim Truman*, follows the JLA to the underworld as they attempt to rescue the captive Sala. But they discover that their mission is even more urgent than they imagined... because the demons who imprisoned her have plans to return to Earth!

The origins of ***JLA: Gatekeeper*** predate the publication of ***Green Lantern Annual #9***. "*Peter Tomasi*, my editor, had been after me to do a big JLA prestige series story for about a year before I started the ***Green Lantern Annual*** story," Truman said. "I was coming up with various ideas, but none of them were really getting my blood pumping. I had some good basic plots, but when I'd step back to look at them none of the ideas were anything that I'd really felt good about investing a year or more of time into. Also, the characters of Superman, Batman, and others have changed so much over the last few years that I was having a hard time getting a handle on the continuity. 'Hawkman's revenge,' perhaps.

"Anyway, about midway through plotting the Sala/Istar story for the ***GL Annual***, it suddenly occurred to me that this could be the background for my JLA story. I was really getting into the Mesopotamian mythology aspect of the Green Lantern story—fascinating stuff. No wonder that other cultures in the area has so much trouble dealing with these folks! It's a culture where the demons were more sympathetic characters than the main gods!

"It seemed like a great environment into which to throw the JLA, and have it work for me. The storyline also presented me with a chance to do something I've wanted to do for a long time—a big fantasy/swords-and-sorcery style comics story. Strange that I've seldom done any comics stories in this genre before—it's my favorite thing to draw. I'm a real child of the early 70's—*Robert E. Howard*, Gar Fox's fantasy books, Brak the Barbarian, *Lin Carter's* Thongor, Ballantine Fantasy and ERB reprints, *Barry Windsor-Smith's* Conan, *Karl Edward Wagner's* fantasy stories, *Michael Moorcock's* fantasies, (I was *born* to draw Elric!), etc. And I've been working on this series for a year or a year and half since!"

For readers who might have missed that ***Green Lantern Annual***, Truman offers some insight into the character of Sala. "Sala is an idealistic archeologist who is intent on saving cultural and religious artifacts from forces that would destroy them for all time. At the time, I was reading articles about how the war in the Mideast and Eurasia was threatening to destroy forever many artifacts, cultural shrines and historical sites. Well, Sala is concerned about the trend and does what she can to rescue these places and articles or record their presence.

"In some ways, she's sort of the flip side of Indiana Jones. It always bothered me that Jones was sometimes taking various religious artifacts away from cultures to whom those artifacts were still a vital aspect of their belief systems. Sala honors the belief systems behind the various artifacts that she's helped save. She wants to save these things before they're crushed into the dust by regimes that don't give a damn about them Interestingly enough, the Taliban's destruction of the ancient Buddhist statues occurred right at the time I was doing the pencils for issue two.

"She's been a social activist, deeply devoted to civil rights on a world wide basis. Even though she's an African woman by birth, trained in America, she makes no racial distinctions in regards to civil rights concerns. She's a humanist, pure and simple.

"Green Lantern met her when they were both students. He doesn't realize until now that he'd developed a bit of a crush on her—that she might be 'the one who got away.'

"One doesn't need to have read the GL story to get all of this when reading the ***Gatekeeper*** series. I constructed the story so that the reader easily catches up and gets what's going on."

While it's been more than a year since the release of ***Green Lantern Annual #9***, there's no such time lag in ***Gatekeeper***, which begins "just a few days or weeks after the annual. However, Kurnugi has a different time curve. Months have passed there, and Sala is on her last legs, surviving in the jungles while being hunted by Kurnugi's overlord, Nergal, and his demonic guard."

***JLA: Gatekeeper*** is a bit of a rarity: a superhero story by *Tim Truman*, a man not known for superhero tales. "I'll be frank: Superheroes stories—at least of the 'tight underwear' kind—set in city settings are not my favorite genre. However, once I put a science-fiction spin on them, as I did in ***Hawkworld***, or a fantasy spin on them, as I did here, they become comfortable for me to do. I also like to do more pulp or 30's-40's based superhero stuff, and have done so many times—Airboy, Sky Wolf, the Spider. But I can't relate to modern garden-variety superheroes in cities, in most cases.

" I wanted to do an old fashioned superhero story, not some precious 'updating' of these heroes. I wanted it to be a simple, well told, classic adventure story, first and foremost. Having just come off my ***Star Wars*** comics assignments when I started ***JLA: Gatekeeper***, I had developed a new appreciation for telling a big fantasy adventure story that anyone could read—any age, any interest. As was the case with the ***Star Wars*** stuff, I was also keenly aware that there are action figures of these characters, marketed to kids. It's great to be able to hand a kid a comic and say 'here, you'll really dig this.' By the same token, I wanted fans of my meatier, more R and PG-17 material to be able to enjoy it, too."

Doing a superhero series required a few adjustments on Truman's part. "It was hard for me to draw these super hero icons at first. And the depictions of most of the characters in the DCU varies so wildly from book to book that I had to settle down and decide which version of them I liked best. Peter saw that I was freezing a little and said 'Tim, don't worry about it so much. Make them your *own*.' Very wise words—Peter's a great editor. So that's what I did, and things really started to rock after that... P

"The biggest problem artistically was that, after I'd finished issue one, I got about thirty pages back and had to redraw Wonder Woman's and Superman's hair on about every panel! It was so hilarious that I just couldn't get angry about it. I did it and turned it in, and used it as an opportunity to rework a few pages and tickle things up a bit more."

The more he got to know the members of the JLA, the more he liked them. "Each one presented something different. the real surprise was Aquaman. I can draw and write Aquaman as easily as one of my own characters. He has this scruffy nobility that brings him closer to one of my own creations, I guess. I had a lot of fun with him. I noticed that he wasn't really doing much in his own books—no offense to anyone else who was working on him—and even in the JLA he tends to be a second stringer. Well, my Aquaman kicks some demon ass. He's physically uncomfortable in Kurnugi—there are two suns, one red and one yellow. So the big boy from Atlantis gets a little irritable from time to time. Peter likes my take on him, too. I'd *love* to have another crack at him, in his own book—a miniseries or something. I think I could give DC a *great* character.

"Wonder Woman was also fun. I found that I started playing her as the 'mother' of the group. It's a realistic take—get a bunch of knuckle-headed, macho guys together and throw a capable woman in their midst, in real life, and suddenly she's the leader of the group, without anyone really knowing it. The guys will look to the woman for the last word, while simultaneously posturing and being macho. If there's trouble, she always has the last word, and the ruling opinion. That's life. It's not an overt thing in the story, but it was there while I was writing the characters. Also, she's very much the Queen of the Amazons in this series. A blood-flecked barbarian queen. She has some great scenes in issue three that I'm really, really proud of. She and Aquaman are really the most 'in their element' characters once they stake their claims in Kurnugi.

"Superman was fun to play with because, as I said, there are two suns. He finds that the radiation of the red sun depletes his powers and makes them a little erratic. As a guy who is now firmly entrenched in my middle ages, I started projecting a lot of things into Superman that I see myself and my friends going through. You can't run as fast, you can't jump as high, you don't feel as macho, little health issues start creeping into your life, and it starts making you angry. So Superman gets a little irritated about being feeling lessened and feels he has to prove himself in more than a few scenes.

"My take on Batman surprised me. If I were doing a Batman solo story, he'd be one dark, grim, fellow. But with the JLA story—especially in tandem with Superman—I immediately wanted to depict him differently. The detective aspects of his personality started coming out. Peter jokingly called him my ***Superfriends*** Batman, and I said 'so be it.' I went back in and darkened him up a little bit, and he gets darker as the story proceeds—especially in the third issue. when he has some major solo bits."

But it was the group *gestalt*, not the individual members, that made ***Gatekeeper*** so appealing. "One of the reasons I wanted to do the story was due to the fact that I'd be dealing with several icons within the framework of a single epic. It was fun adding Batman, Superman, and Wonder Woman to the list of real American icons that I've worked on. I mean. I've done Tarzan and the Lone Ranger, and now these guys. If I could do a Walt Disney Mickey Mouse story, I suppose I'd have *all* the bases covered!"

***Gatekeeper*** also features a couple of guest stars who added to Truman's creative enjoyment. "Dr. Fate is in the first issue—he helps them open the mystic Gateway to Kurnugi. He was fun to do... and the Gnomes from my ***Creature Commandos*** miniseries reappear—or at least an offshoot branch. If I could do 'All Gnomes Comics,' I'd be a happy man!"

So does he have a favorite character? "I have to admit, Sala is my favorite character to draw. I'd really have to watch that, and make sure that her scenes didn't overpower everything else... I'd love to return to these characters, and this setting. A Wonder Woman/Sala team up would be wonderful. A feast of flashing swords!"

Truman is proud of the fact that ***Gatekeeper*** is a solo effort. "No assistants, no slaves. Except for the lettering by *Ken Lopez* and the coloring. *Gregory Wright* is doing the colors by the way. He was very nice—the artwork I've been doing really surprised him, I think. It's way more detailed and consistent than anything I've ever done in the past. He paid me some heavy compliments that made me feel pretty good... I'm pretty proud of the book. The story is solid and fun, and the artwork is the best, most consistent that I've ever done, anywhere. I feel like I'm finally able to draw and ink in a way I've always wanted to.

"I'm using a more ornate, crosshatched style than I used in the past. I started developing the technique with the ***Aurra Sing*** one shot I did for Dark Horse. About half the pages in that book were a successful shot at this style. I went into it further and more successfully with the 'Brer Hoodoo' story I drew for Vertigo's ***Flinch*** anthology and the story I did for the CBLDF benefit book, 'Murder By Crowquill.' I was used to working in a far faster way, so it took a long time to get a new schedule down with this style."

The new style may have been much more time-consuming, but it's evident that the investment of time paid off quite well for Truman and for ***JLA*** fans—as you'll be able to see for on October 17th, when ***JLA: Gatekeeper #1***, a $4.95 comic, is scheduled for release.

by Curt Biggins

Courtesy your friendly neighborhood comics outlet!

## Defenders Redefined

A couple of weeks ago, ***CSNsider*** told you about *Erik Larsen*'s departure from ***The Defenders*** after the twelfth issue of the series. At the Canadian National Expo in late August, writer *Kurt Busiek* revealed details about post-Larsen plans for the series, which will definitely continue (in spite of rumors of cancellation) with a major refocus.

Larsen's final work for the series will be December's "silent issue" of ***Defenders***; afterwards, *Fabian Nicieza* and *Mark Bagley* (the acclaimed ***New Warriors*** team) will be guest creators for ***Defenders #13***... and then there's the fourteenth issue.

Or is there?

# "***Defenders #14*** won't be called ***Defenders #14,***" Busiek said. "It will be called ***Overlords: Defenders Against The Earth #1.***" However, Busiek said, "in true *Joe Quesada* fashion, it will have a '14' underneath it... we're continuing the numbering. We're *not* trying to fool people."

As Busiek explained, the Overlords story (which will run for six issues) begins when the four core members of the team are saddled with the responsibility of acting as the planet's constant Defenders, protecting the Earth against all sorts of menaces. As the responsibility begins to wear on them, they plead with Gaea, the spirit of the Earth, to "lift the curse and free them from its bondage—and she refuses. So the Defenders, furious beyond reason at the continuing indignity of the curse, decide that if they're to be forced to defend the planet, no matter what it does to their lives and other responsibilities, they're going to do it in the most efficient way possible: They're going to rule the Earth. That way, they can keep it running in an orderly and peaceful manner, keep disruptions to a minimum, and attend to their duties as Defenders without destroying their lives as individuals. That's the theory, at least.

"But naturally, people object—not just the billions being ruled, but armies, governments, and superheroes, including the Fantastic Four, the X-Men, the Avengers and more. But let's face it, these are the Defenders. They include the Sorcerer Supreme of this plane of reality, a wielder of the Power Cosmic, the monarch of Atlantis who commands the monsters of the seas and the single mightiest creature ever to walk the face of the Earth. They may very well be able to take on any and all opposition and lay them out flat.

"Other Defenders—Nighthawk, Hellcat and Valkyrie—have to find out what's really going on, why their former allies are acting like supervillains and what could be done about. Can they succeed where armies and Avengers can't? The future of the world may depend on them doing just that."

Busiek credited Larsen with the inspiration for the story. "Originally, we were going to have Doctor Strange go bad. And then we decided, just let them *all* go bad. This is going to underscore the difference between the Avengers and the Defenders. When you're in trouble and the Avengers show up, you say, 'Oh, thank God, we're saved.' When you're in trouble and the Defenders show up, you say, 'Marge, get the kids in the station wagon, don't bother to pack. We're leaving the state and we'll be back when all this is over.'"

Busiek won't be working solo as writer of The Defenders; he'll be joined by Jo Duffy, who was an assistant editor of the Defenders in their old run. "Jo is a naturally terrific writer," Busiek said. "She's got a great sense of humor, a great sense of character, of drama, of pacing. I've only had a couple of creative meetings with her so far, and she's already suggested ideas that make me say, 'this book is going to be *so* much fun.'"

Completing the ***Defenders*** team is *Matt Haley*, whose promotional art for the series shows different versions of three of the core members, with only the Surfer retaining his old look. "It's going to be a *very* different-looking book. It's going to be a very *spooky* looking book," Busiek said.

## He's Got the Power

Back in March, *CSN* told you about ***The Power Company,*** the new series that *Kurt Busiek* is producing for DC. In case you've forgotten, here's how Busiek describes the book: "***The Power Company*** is a professional superhero firm organized like a law firm. Clients, pro bono work, billable hours, partners, associates, support staff—all that kind of thing. But they're *not* lawyers (well, *one* of them is, but...). They don't go try cases, they don't file briefs -- they save the world, they rescue people, they clash with super-villains, they get involved in character drama ... but the context is that of their business, their company. "The members of ***Power Company*** aren't all there for the same reason—one might be out to do good and save lives, while another wants to make as much money as possible, a third wants glory and fame, and a fourth just wants a steady job. The contrast and clash that comes from the heroes' different motivations will make for some pretty lively character drama. But, because the Power Company is a *firm* rather than a *team*, they won't regularly all go on the same missions—we can use the whole roster as needed, but we can also focus on individual members as they're needed."

You won't see the series until early 2002, but you will get a sneak peek at the super-team in December, when ***JLA #61*** features an almost-book-length preview of ***The Power Company***. So that means that the series itself starts in January 2002, right? Think again! Before ***The Power Company*** begins its monthly run, you'll meet the team's members in a series of seven one-shots slated for January release. The books are:

•***Josiah Power*** (illustrated by *Keith Giffen* and *Al Milgrom*): "The managing partner of the Power Company is a man named Josiah Power, a successful African-American attorney, who, during the ***Invasion*** crossover some years back, got his metagene powers in a way that it destroyed his legal career. So he's got find some other business to be in. The one-shot takes place shortly after the ***Invasion*** crossover ended, and guest-stars Superman and the Justice League of the time—Blue Beetle, Booster Gold and those guys."

•***Witchfire*** (illustrated by *Matt Haley* and *Karl Kesel*): "Witchfire is a media celebrity *par excellence*. She's a famous singer, model, actress in generally-awful movies and she's even a daredevil stunt-cyclist. If it involves getting her name in the news, she's usually up for it. She also dabbles in the occult, and has bizarre and dangerous mystic powers. Her one-shot is set back around the time *George Pérez* was writing and drawing ***Wonder Woman*** and it guest-stars Wonder Woman."

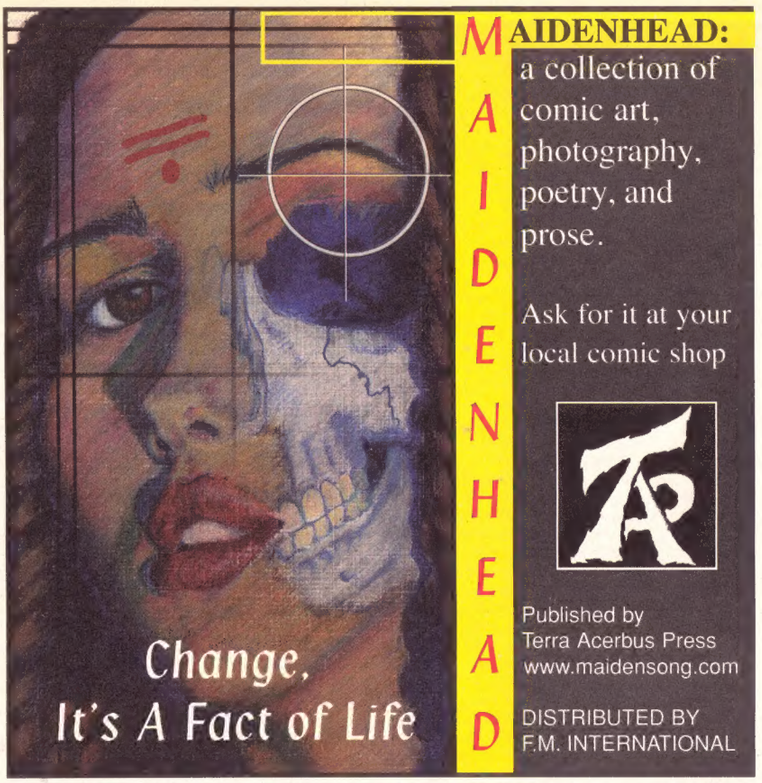
•***Skyrocket***, (illustrated by *Joe Staton* and *Christian Alamy*): "Skyrocket is the team's most dedicated hero, and she's the field leader. She's an intensely patriotic African-American woman and an ex-Navy aviator, who for the last seven years has been the lone super-hero of St. Louis. She just showed up for all the big crossovers in between panels. She's been around for a while. She's the one with the best reputation. In Marvel terms, she's the Captain America of the team. Her one-shot involves her origin, is set back about seven years ago in the DC Universe and guest-stars Hal Jordan as Green Lantern."

•***Manhunter***, (illustrated by *Dan Jurgens* and *Bob Layton*): "...of whom I will practically tell you *nothing*. All I'll tell you about Manhunter is that when we figured out what we wanted to do with this character, I called *Walt Simonson* and said, 'Walt, I've got an idea. If you don't want us to do it, we won't do it.' A week later, he called back and made one request and the said, 'OK, go ahead. You've got our blessing.' It opens in the middle of the Goodwin/Simonson Manhunter epic, but most of the one-shot involves a clash between Manhunter and Nightwing."

•***Striker Z*** (illustrated by *Ramon Bach* and *Raul Fernandez*): "He's a former Hong Kong action-movie stuntman. He gained his super powers in an accident. He's an up-and-coming twenty-something superhero with an agent, a PR rep, and only the vaguest idea of what he wants to do with his career. He'd like to be a good guy... he'd like to be enormously rich. His one-shot is set a few years ago in Hong Kong and features Superboy back in the era when he was living in Hawaii."

•***Bork*** (illustrated by by *Kieron Dwyer* and *Rick Remender*): "You remember him from such wonderful stories as 'But Bork Can Hurt You.' Bork is a one-shot character who appear in ***Brave & The Bold: Batman and Flash*** drawn by *Neal Adams*—one of the *dumbest* stories *Bob Haney* has ever written, and that's going a ways. Bork was an indestructible merchant seaman who wanted to set himself up as the king of the Gotham docks, but since the end of that story has been in jail. While he was in prison, the power that made him indestructible has kind of mutated and made him a bigger, uglier freak than he ever was before. The one-shot is set during his time in jail, actually during a breakout in which he encounters Batman and the Flash again and has an experience that changes the direction of his life."

•***Sapphire*** (illustrated by *Mark Bagley* and *Mark Farmer*): "She was a teenage runaway trying to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survive on the streets of San Diego and she wound up accidentally bonded to a technologically super-weapon—an artificial gem that she can control completely, so she can extrude a one-molecule thick armor across her body. The one downside to having this great power is that the super-weapon was in possession of Kobra, who wants it back—and wants whomever took it dead. Everyday she draws breath, she's headed for a major clash with Kobra, and he is willing to go through the entire Power Company to get to her. The Sapphire one-shot guest-stars the modern-day JLA."

Then, in February, ***Power Company #1*** is scheduled for release; the ongoing series will be illustrated by *Tom Grummett and Wade von Grawbadger* and colored by *Alex Sinclair*.

## Factory X Puts the Hammer Down

DC fans have enjoyed prop replicas of such comic book *objets d'arte* as the ***Batarang*** and ***Hal Jordan's Power Battery*** thanks to the efforts of DC Direct—but Marvel fans have had no such props to adorn their shelves and showcases... until now, that is.

Factory X has reached an agreement with Marvel to produce a series of full-sized prop replicas, and their kicking off their line with a full-sized ***Hammer of Thor Replica***. The 17" long Mjolnir, which will be produced in a limited run of fifteen hundred copies, has a cast aluminum head (Uru proved hard to come by) and has a grip that is double-wrapped in top-grain leather. Included with the hammer is a display base with a nameplate.

***The Hammer of Thor***, which is scheduled for release in December, is the first of several replica props in the works from the company—and coming up in 2002, reportedly, is a full-sized ***Captain America Shield***!

## Going for a Mature Image

Last week, ***CSNsider*** told you about *Joseph Michael Linsner's* plans to move his hit series ***Dawn*** to Image. Now, the publisher has revealed that this won't be the only mature-readers title to appear under the Image imprint.

Pro by *Garth Ennis, Amanda Conner,* and *Jimmy Palmiotti*, which was first mentioned four weeks ago in ***CSN***, is perhaps the most mature book that Image has ever published—in fact, Image is describing it as a comic for adults only. Conner and Palmiotti joked "We plan on keeping the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund working for years" with this "way over the edge" series, which tells the story of a super-powered prostitute.

While ***Pro*** and ***Dawn*** have a mature edge, publisher *Jim Valentino* assured Image fans that these are not the sort of "good girl" comics that the company dropped from their line shortly after Valentino's tenure began. "***Pro*** is a satire. Ennis is one of comics' premiere authors and he promises that this piece will be nothing short of blistering. Linsner is an intelligent writer whose art is far closer to Vargas in terms of its style, grace, and quality than to the tawdry titillation books of the past. Image Central remains focused on a wide diversity of product from exceptional creators. We believe these projects and these creators fit that bill."

***Pro*** and ***Dawn*** are scheduled to debut from Image in 2002.

## Ins & Outs

**Out**: ***Ultimate Marvel Magazine*** and ***Marvel Knights Magazine***. Marvel editor-in-chief Joe Quesada confirmed that both reprint magazines are being cancelled due to poor sales; that's bad news because these magazines, with their larger page-size and upscale paper stock, offered better quality reproduction of the material than what appeared in the regular comics. Quesada described the cancellation as "good news and bad news. The good news is that our sell through on the newsstand has increased tremendously! The bad news is that our newsstand distributor suggested that we cancel the mags because they're not getting racked properly, and if we were going to invest those kind of man hours it would be best to focus it on monthly comics since it seems that there is great renewed interest."

**Out**: ***Spawn—The Dark Ages***, which ends with #28. The creative team of *Steve Niles, Nat Jones, Kevin Conrad,* and *Todd Broeker* will continue to work together on a new Image title, Fused.

**In**: ***Hellspawn*** and ***Sam & Twitch***. Contrary to the rumors, both titles are continuing. *Steve Niles* will handle the writing honors on ***Hellspawn***, while a new artist to replace the departing *Ashley Wood* will be named in the near future. *Todd McFarlane* will continue to write ***Sam & Twitch***, with *Alex Maleev* handling the art through #26, at which point a new artist will take over.

**In?**: Speculation is running hot that Marvel is engaged in talks with *Neil Gaiman* and possibly with *Todd McFarlane* regarding a ***Miracleman Trade Paperback*** reprinting the entire run of the series—including material never published in comics form before. Quesada alluded to the deal as a possibility, but was understandably reticent regarding details. If a deal does come about, though, you'll read about it here!

## GT Labs is Da Bomb

*Jim Ottaviani* of G.T. Labs isn't your average comic book creator. Sure, he's the writer of such fascinating true-science gems as ***Two-Fisted Science*** and ***Dignifying Science***—but he's also put in some time at the controls of a nuclear reactor and has a master's degree in nuclear engineering. So it's only natural that he should want to combine his interests in science and comics.

This fall, Ottaviani gets even more specific regarding his interests when he releases ***Fallout***, a 240-page original trade paperback that details the development of the atomic bomb and the toll it took on its creators... and on the world. "It's a fascinating story," Ottaviani said, "as it signals the beginning of 'big science' and the death knell for the age of innocence, if you will, as far as scientific morality goes. The main characters in the book, Oppenheimer and Szilard, are both misunderstood, and I wanted to present them and the conflicts they dealt with to a new readership."

As he worked on ***Fallout***, chronicling the work of *J. Robert Oppenheimer, Leo Szilard, Robert Teller, William Groves*, and others, Ottaviani discovered that "there are few villains. Groves thought Szilard was one. Teller thought Oppenheimer was. Many thought Teller a villain. I don't agree 100% with any of those views."

***Fallout*** features art by an impressive array of talents, including *Steve Lieber* (a good friend of Ottaviani's who collaborated with him on his first atom-bomb-development story, "Heavy Water," a few years ago), *Vince Locke, Bernie Mireault, Eddy Newell, Jeffrey Jones*, and others. Look for it in October.

## Bowen's Going Bust... and Statuesque, Too

The three-dimensional comics collectibles field continues to explode, with more and more companies adding statues, mini-statues, and busts to their lines... but Randy Bowen and his studio, Bowen Designs, still remains the field's most respected independent production house. There's good reason, of course: if you've ever taken a look at Bowen's design work on his Marvel statues and busts, you know that there's a real emphasis placed on quality at Bowen Designs.

Bowen Designs has announced its schedule for the next few months, and it includes some stunning sculptures. Here's what you can look forward to:

**November**

- ***Doctor Doom Mini-Statue*** (7.5" tall, designed by Randy Bowen)

**December**

- ***Iron Man Classic & Retro Statues*** (each 14" tall, designed by Randy Bowen; also available in 300-edition matched set with a certificate signed by Bowen)
- ***Thing Mini-Bust*** (5.5" tall, sculpted by *Randy Bowen*)
- ***Galactus Mini-Bust*** ("mini" hardly seems to apply to this 11" tall bust that captures the planet-gobbler in all his helmed glory as sculpted by *Randy Bowen*)

**January**

- ***Dr. Strange Mini-Bust*** (5" tall, a stunning rendition of the Ditkoesque Dr. Strange complete with tapestry-trim cloak, sculpted by *Thomas Kuntz*).

While Bowen has made no announcements concerning other statues in the works for 2002, a peek at the company's home page also reveals a minibust of ***Prince Namor the Sub-Mariner*** and an early-stage sculpt of ***Cyclops*** in development.

Fans who wish to add some of these sculptures to their display shelves should act quickly—some Bowen statues, such as the now-out-of-production ***Daredevil Yellow Costume Mini-Statue***, sell out so quickly that many fans don't even realize they've been released!

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- Coven Dark Sister PX Raptor Prism Foil Cover #½
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- Lord of the Rings Tabletop Battle Game Miniatures
- MAC Vampire Angel 2001 Previews Exclusive Figure

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- The Simpsons: Comic Book Guy "Worst Cap Ever" PX Cap
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# CSNSIGHTS

## Reviewed by Cliff Biggers

Welcome to our revised review column! In an effort to give you more information about each book covered, we're abandoning the old one-to-five-star format for a series of one-to-ten scales for art, story, and the comic book gestalt overall.

- 0-2 - Poor quality; not worth your time
- 3-4 - Below average, but with some redeeming aspects
- 5 - Average
- 6 - Above average; worth a close look
- 7 - A superior comics experience
- 8 - Exceptionally good
- 9 - Superlative
- 10 - The best the field has to offer

### Titans of Finance 1

**(Alternative Comics, $2.95)**

**Story: R. Walker** **Art: Josh Neufeld**

Story: 9.0
Art: 5.5
Overall: 7.5

I have a good friend who doesn't agree with me that any subject can make for good comics, if the creators can simply find the right approach to bring that subject to life. To support my view, I point to Will Eisner's instructional comics for the *PS* magazine, to Larry Gonick's superlative *Cartoon History of the Universe*, to Paradox Press's delightfully quirky *Big Books*... and now to Walker & Neufeld's *Titans of Finance*.

HE BOUGHT McANDREWS & FORBES, A CANDY MAKER HE TURNED INTO A VEHICLE FOR SWEET CORPORATE TAKEOVERS. HE FLIPPED TECHNICOLOR FOR MORE THAN A HALF-BILLION DOLLAR PROFIT, AND MADE HOSTILE BIDS FOR THE LIKES OF REVLON.
I'M LOOKING FOR ANOTHER MEDIA INVESTMENT.
RAIDIN' RONNIE BECAME PART OF THE '80s PANTHEON.
PREDATORS' BALL
HERE'S AN IDEA: MARVEL COMICS.
WHY MARVEL? ITS 3,000-PLUS CHARACTERS WERE PRACTICALLY AN AMERICAN MYTHOLOGY. THEY COULD BE EXPLOSIVELY EXPLOITED, FROM TRADING CARDS TO MOVIES, JUST LIKE WALT "BIZNEY'S" CREW!
I REALLY IDENTIFY WITH NIGHTCRAWLER...
PERELMAN PAID $83 MILLION FOR MARVEL, MOST OF IT BORROWED -- ABOUT DOUBLE WHAT THE PREVIOUS OWNER HAD PAID FIVE YEARS EARLIER.
WITH NEW LICENSING DEALS, INDUSTRY SALES BOOMED: FROM $60 MILLION TO $800 MILLION. MARVEL WENT PUBLIC JUST AS COMICS EXPLODED!
WIFE #2

Let's face it: Wall Street tycoons, tyros, and kooks don't sound like ideal subject matter for a comic book. But R. Walker's insightful scripts take readers beneath the two-dimensional surface of these financial figures, reminding us that they are distinctive, eccentric, and complex people, not just expensive suits with big bankbooks and hefty portfolios.

The highlight of the book, at least for comic fans, is the story of Ron Perelman, the man who monkeyed with the eight-hundred-pound gorilla of comics, Marvel, and nearly transformed them into an extinct species. The irreverent look at Perelman's background, modus operandi, and lifestyle gives readers some insight into the man who did such damage to the comics field... and makes it clear, ironically, how ultimately unimportant comics were to Perelman. For those of us who love the medium, his effects on the industry are troubling and detrimental; for Perelman, though, it's just one more company to be manipulated, drained, and possibly destroyed for personal gain.

Michael Vranos' story is almost as compelling—and just similar enough that you begin to see a pattern here. Financial player enters the picture, makes some impressive short-term profits, becomes a darling of the financial field, That's not the case in every story... but it happens so frequently that you might find yourself mentally constructing the next chapters in the careers of those financial

Dark Horse's Newest and Hottest Monthly Manga Series Exaxxion Arrives!
PREVIEWS
SEP 2001
THE COMIC SHOP'S CATALOG
TAKING BACK THE NIGHT
CAT WOMAN
ED BRUBAKER, DARWYN COOKE AND MIKE ALLRED RELAUNCH DC's FELINE FATALE IN AN ALL NEW MONTHLY SERIES.

# One-Stop Shopping

**The September 2001 *PREVIEWS* has cool stuff that starts shipping in November!**

**On the front: Catwoman #1 from DC Comics!**

**On the back: Inferno #1 from Image Comics!**

**Plus:**

- Manga superstar Kenichi Sonada, creator of *Gunsmith Cats*, strikes again with his latest creation, the sci-fi adventure series, **Cannon God Exaxxion** from Dark Horse!
- DC's greatest super-team debuts on the Cartoon Network in the all-new *Justice League* animated series, and DC Comics has their cartoon exploits covered in the **Justice League Adventures!**
- A band of mercenaries and killers, sinners-all, enter the gates of Hell to save our world from a demonic invasion in Top Cow Studio's hot new supernatural action/adventure series, **Inferno**, from Marc Silvestri, Dwayne Turner, and Image Comics!
- Marvel Comics presents the animated adventures of Professor Xavier's mutant students, in the debut issue of **X-Men: Evolution #1**, based on the hit cartoon series!
- Wizard Entertainment presents the first quarterly issue of **Anime Invasion #1**, featuring all of the latest news and information on the hottest manga, anime, and more!

**And:**

- **Alan Moore's Glory** is resurrected by Avatar Press with not one, but seven unique cover variants!
- CrossGen Comics previews the latest addition to their burgeoning family of inter-related series in the **Negation Prequel**, featuring the writing of Mark Waid and Tony Bedard, and the art of Paul Pelletier!
- **Murder Me Dead**, the follow-up series from *Stray Bullets* creator David Lapham, is collected in a beautiful hardcover edition, packed with all of the passion and intrigue of the 9-issue series!
- The saga of the **Transformers** continues in **Volume 2: The End of the Road**, available from Titan Books in softcover as well as a Previews Exclusive hardcover edition!

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# Non-Stop Fun!

**Don't miss out on:**

- **Alex Ross Battle of the Planets Lithograph** from Dynamic Forces!
- **The Simpsons: Comic Book Guy "Worst Cap Ever" Previews Exclusive Cap** in the Apparel Section!
- **Masters of the Universe 2001 Action Figures** in the Toys Section!
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# CSNSIGHTS

characters who currently remain at the top of their personal wheel of fame and fortune.

If I have any complaint about ***Titans of Finance***, it's that the book is simply too brief. Walker and Neufeld do such a good job that you want them to continue to offer a comic book look at financial follies, famous figures, and foulups. Let's hope that the ***Titans*** return for a second issue!

## Doom Patrol 1

**(DC, $2.50)**

**Story: John Arcudi** **Art: Tan Eng Huat**

**Story:** 7
**Art:** 8.5
**Overall:** 8

I have the fondest of memories of the original ***Doom Patrol*** by *Arnold Drake* and *Bruno Premiani*; this story of a freakish superteam ostracized by society appeared the same month as Marvel's ***X-Men***—and they last almost as long as that mutant team did in their first incarnation, finally going out with a historic bang in the early 1970s.

Unfortunately, subsequent efforts to bring the team back have failed to recapture the essential "misfit appeal" of the original series. Some have become too fascinated with the freakish aspect of the original series; others have tried too hard to be offbeat and surreal.

With this new ***Doom Patrol,*** Arcudi and Huat have come closer to the spirit of the original comic book, without succumbing to slavish imitation. The book does more than resurrect

the old Doom Patrol name: it also features a central character who was a member of that bygone team—namely Cliff Steele, better known to most as Robotman. Problem is, he doesn't want to be Robotman...

The X-Men were born mutants, gifted with powers that were an inherent part of them. The members of Doom Patrol, however, were reluctant heroes, people sho suffered life-changing experiences that changed their lives forever in ways that they didn't necessarily appreciate. As this series begins, Cliff Steele has done his best to regain a semblance of normalcy in his life... but ultimately, it's nothing more than an illusory normalcy.

His team is comprised of another group of reluctant heroes, novices at the superhero field who might best be described as the "not-ready-for-prime-time metahumans." And the twain might ne'er meet, were it not for the machinations of a multibillionaire looking for his very own superteam to market and manipulate for fame and fortune.

Arcudi's story, entertaining and character-driven, draws the reader in with its juxtaposition of two heroic tales. One is the tale of a team that wants to be heroic but can't quite pull it all together; the other is the story of a man who wants to be normal but can't evade the heroism that's thrust upon him. And it's multibillionaire Thayer Jost who's going to bring the two together.

The most exciting aspect of ***Doom Patrol*** is editor Andy Helfer's new art find, Tan Eng Huat. If you like fine-line art with a distinctive style, Huat is the man for you. His work has anime-like elements of cartooniness evident in its layout and figure design, but he balances that with a deftly rendered line that gives the finished work a European feel. If there's any room for improvement in Huat's work, it's found in his line weight; his figures are sometimes delineated with the same line as is used for the background art, resulting in figures that can be lost in the details of the page. Of course, that's also true of Geoff Darrow's art, and he seems to have done quite well for himself regardless!...

No doubt about it—Huat is going to be one of the most popular newcomers of 2001, and that's going to help draw a lot fans to ***Doom Patrol.*** The good news is that once they're through ogling the art, they're going to find out that they've picked up a pretty entertaining read as well!

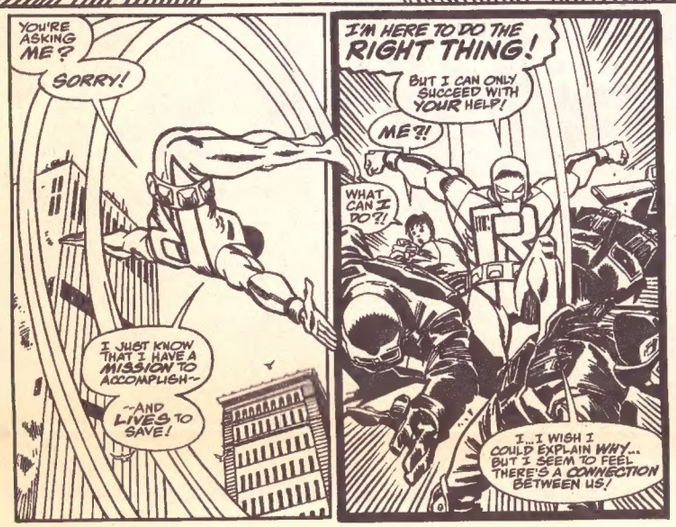
## Mr. Right 1

**(Image, $2.95)**

**Story: Tom DeFalco**
**Art: Ron Frenz & Sal Buscema**
**(backup story by Ron Lim & Robert Jones**

**Story:** 7.5
**Art:** 6
**Overall:** 7

Tom DeFalco has become one of comics' most reliable "unsung creators." Like a veteran blues guitarist who


YOU'RE ASKING ME?
SORRY!
I JUST KNOW THAT I HAVE A MISSION TO ACCOMPLISH--
--AND LIVES TO SAVE!
I'M HERE TO DO THE RIGHT THING!
BUT I CAN ONLY SUCCEED WITH YOUR HELP!
ME?!
WHAT CAN I DO?!
I...I WISH I COULD EXPLAIN WHY... BUT I SEEM TO FEEL THERE'S A CONNECTION BETWEEN US!

refuses to adapt his style to whatever style is popular and trendy, DeFalco remains true to his storytelling roots... and those roots are planted deep in Marvel's Silver Age history. DeFalco tells the same sort of story that Stan Lee told in the glory days of Marvel—stories focused on the human side of superheroes, stories that stress plot over subplot, and stories that deliver a complete entertainment experience in each and every issue.

For Marvel, DeFalco continues to produce one of the most reader-accessible titles on the stands today, ***Spider-Girl***. But his new venture with Image Comics allows DeFalco (and his former Marvel partners Ron Lim, Ron Frenz, and Sal Buscema) to cut loose with new characters that seem like they'd feel right at home in the Marvelverse of the 1960s and 1970s.

DeFalco describes his storytelling style as "hoo-hah action," and that's an apt summary: in each story, he introduces the necessary characters, sets up the conflict, builds to a heroic-action climax, and wraps things up. That's right—Tom DeFalco delivers a beginning, a middle, and an end in each tale... and that's all too rare in today's comics. Even more unusual, sometimes DeFalco includes multiple stories in one comic—and that means that readers get two or three beginnings, middles, and ends, just like in the Silver Age!

I've heard some argue that DeFalco is more a comics craftsman than an *artiste*—but if being a craftsman means meticulously building complete stories that a new reader can follow without footnotes, then perhaps the field could use a lot more craftsmen!

***Mr. Right***, the second Image title by DeFalco, features Marvel-style art by Ron Frenz—a penciller known to draw heavily from the work of Jack Kirby and John Buscema in his page design—and Sal Buscema, acclaimed inker and a solid penciller in his own right. With a team like this, it's no surprise that this book seems so Marvel-esque in its structure. If Marvel were to create an all-ages line, this is the sort of story that should be at its core: young, likeable hero, fast-paced action, archetypal characters with a clearly-delineated ethical sense. And there's a light, flippant tone to the book that evokes memories of Lee-Kirby Silver Age comics.

The concept of ***Mr. Right*** might be viewed as a derivation of Captain Marvel—a young boy is somehow linked to an adult superhero—but in this case, it's not magic, but science that explains the existence of Mr. Right. And DeFalco adds one intriguing twist to the symbiosis: when Mr. Right is injured, young Jeffrey feels the pain... and we presume that, if Mr. Right is killed, Jeffrey will likewise be a casualty. DeFalco doesn't explore this aspect of the story too deeply, but he makes it clear that it's an element of the story that must be considered in future issues.

The art by solid and reliable; the Ron Squad (Frenz for the first two stories in this issue, Lim for the short backup that guest-stars Randy O'Donnell from DeFalco's other Image title, The M@n) know how to tell a story visually, and they seem to be turning in some of their best work in years for these Image titles.

***Mr. Right*** is not only a great title for veteran fans who remember the Silver Age with fondness, but it's also a perfect book for fans who want solid superhero comics without the ethical complexities and excessively brutal violence that typifies too many books these days. DeFalco and company have proven that quality and all-ages-accessibility don't have to be mutually exclusive.

## Image Introduces ... Primate 1

**(Image, $2.95)**

**Story: Beau Smith & Kevin Bernhardt**
**Art: Mitch Byrd & Ryan Odagawa**

| | |
|---|---|
| Story: | 7 |
| Art: | 8 |
| Overall: | 7.5 |

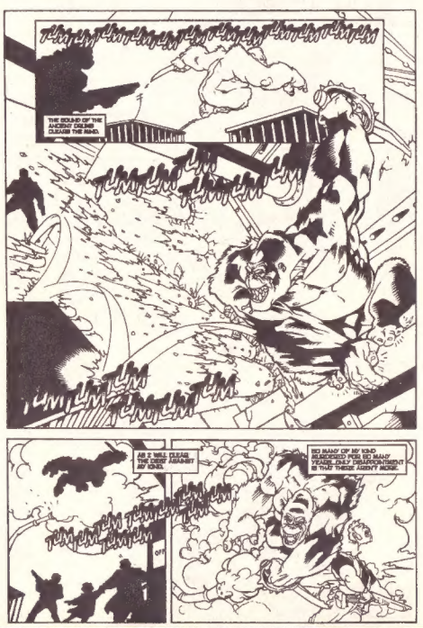
What is it with comics 'n' gorillas?

Reportedly, DC noticed that one way to boost the sale of comics in the Silver Age was to put a gorilla on the cover; suddenly, heroes were battling apes, defending apes, turning into apes... In more recent times, we've seen such comics as ***Monkeyman & O'Brien,*** the recently-resurrected ***Angel & the Ape,*** and even the JLApe simian-superhero event. And now Image monkeys around with the venerable ape-comic with ***Primate: The Sword of Darwin***, the first book in the ***Image Introduces*** line.

In a field where most stories go on far longer than they should, ***Primate*** is an oddity: a book that should have been *longer* than it is. The opening eight-page sequence that sets up the premise—a silverback ape gains superior mental abilities thanks to stress and some vaguely unexplained magic—seems severely flawed when compressed into so few pages. It's difficult to accept the fact that this ape is suddenly more intelligent than most humans, simply because there's not even an attempt at a convincing explanation. The whole "willing suspension of disbelief" factor kicks in, making it more difficult than it should be to fully enjoy the remainder of the book because those first eight pages just aren't enough to "sell" the premise.

Once you get past the weak and unconvincing opening, however, Smith & Bernhardt tell a pretty solid adventure story that brings an ape to New York City on a mission of vengeance. Mitch Byrd's art is the book's most appealing asset, though; by the time you finish the book, you'll be wondering why Byrd isn't doing a high-profile monthly.

***Primate*** is the comic book equivalent of a well-crafted summer popcorn cinematic extravaganza—but a little monkeying around with the opening section could have made it much more than that.



## Alias 1

**(Marvel/MAX, $2.99)**

**Story: Brian Bendis Art:Michael Gaydos**

| | |
|---|---|
| Story | 7.5 |
| Art: | 5 |
| Overall: | 6.5 |

Brian Bendis' ***Alias***, the kickoff title of Marvel's mature-readers MAX line, is, in some ways, a funhouse-mirror distortion of his popular series ***Powers***. ***Powers*** stars detectives who investigate cases involving superheroes; ***Alias*** stars a former superhero turned detective whose cases often bring her into contact with superheroes. But where ***Powers*** features self-assured investigators who become our eyes to the world of feet-of-clay superheroes, it's private investigator Jessica Jones who possesses the feet of clay in ***Alias***.

Jones was once a superhero.. but no one remembers her because she was so bad at it. Now she's a detective on the periphery of the superhero world, involved in seemingly-mundane cases that inevitably seem to have a superhero tie-in. She's wasn't happy with her old superhero role, she's not too happy about what she's become... ultimately, she's just not very happy.

The character of Jessica Jones is fascinating in an auto-wreck sort of way—you know that bad things are coming her way, but you can't avert your gaze. My only problem with the first issue is with a supporting cast member, Luke Cage. Cage, a hero with almost three decades of history in the Marvelverse, is presented in a very out-of-character sequence that squanders the potential of one of Marvel's most high-profile black heroes. And that's a shame, because the story could have worked just as well without this out-of-character sequence.

Michael Gaydos' art, rough and unpolished, is well suited for an edgy noir-style comic... but his art is sometimes less convincing in the superheroic scenes. All things considered, though, his coarse, rumpled style seems quite well suited for Alias, conveying an attitude that might be lost with more polished art.

The superheroic elements of *Alias* guarantee that the book will be controversial, and that'll sell the book initially—but it's Bendis' character-driven storyline that'll keep 'em coming back month after month.

## So You Want To Be a Super-Villain?

**(Epoch, $1.95)**

**Story & Art: Rick Lundeen**

| | |
|---|---|
| Story | 8 |
| Art: | 7 |
| Overall: | 7.5 |

There are just too few funny books in today's funnybook market.

Thankfully, there are creators like Rick Lundeen willing to help restore the balance.

*So You Want To Be a Super-Villain?* is a genuinely funny take on an established superhero convention: the super-villain. Peter Willis, who's just turned forty as the book begins, has decided that his role in life is to become a comic book bad guy... so he makes a list of all the prerequisites and sets out to reinvent himself.

As Peter Willis reshapes his eyebrows, develops all the proper supervillain characteristics, and shops for the perfect costume, he manages to underscore the silliness of a lot of supervillain stereotypes—but it's obvious that creator Rick Lundeen's gentle mocking is rooted in affection for comics, not condescension. This is comic book humor in the Mark Evanier—Sergio Aragonés style, with a minor twist ending that brings the story to a satisfying close.

Anyone who's ever thought about the inherent lunacy of a bad guy putting on a flashy costume and issuing public challenges to a superhero who's almost certain to defeat him will find chuckles galore in *So You Want To Be a Super-Villain?* And anyone who *hasn't* considered any of this prior to reading Lundeen's little tale will never view supervillainy the same way again...

(6) He NEED A COSTUME...
MM, LOOK AT THE SWASHBUCKLER!
I DON'T KNOW IF STRAPS ARE FLATTERING FOR YOU. YOU DON'T HAVE A BUTT.
THIS IS A DISASTER!

## Angel Volume 2 Number 1

**(Dark Horse, $2.99)**

**Story: Joss Whedon $ Brett Matthews**
**Art: Mel Rubi & Chris Dreier**

| | |
|---|---|
| Story | 9 |
| Art: | 8 |
| Overall: | 8.5 |

Ever wonder why so many television series and films stumble when they make the transition to comics? For the most part, it's because the comic fails to capture whatever distinctive flavor made the teevee show or film popular to begin with—characters are often flat and lackluster, plots often seem derivative, and the creative spark that ignited the cinematic/video work is extinguished by the layers of bureaucratic approval inherent in the adaptation process.

Dark Horse has found the perfect way to bypass these problems and create a teevee-inspired comic that is every bit as good as—if not better than—the program that it's based on. What's their answer? They enlisted the television series creator and writer to relaunch the comic book series—and in this case, they're even luckier, because the writer in question has already proven his skill at writing comics, having already produced one hit series this year for Dark Horse.

Joss Whedon, creator of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and co-creator of *Angel*, has revamped Dark Horse's *Angel* comic, giving the book the same mixture of wit, adventure, and dark occult fantasy that has made the television series a fan favorite. The result is a comic that actually *outdoes* the television series, because Whedon (along with co-writer Brett Matthews) can include elements in the comic that couldn't possibly be done on television with *Angel*'s budget. That means that *Angel Vol 2 #1* reads more like the first segment of an *Angel* motion picture that WB hasn't gotten around to making yet—bigger, edgier, and more effects-laden than the television series, but with the same quirky characterization and sharp dialogue that exemplifies the program that inspired the comic.

*Mel Rubi* and *Chris Dreier*'s art is just what teevee-inspired comic illustration should be: good storytelling with strong, stylish linework that also features recognizable likenesses of the series' main characters. That may sound simple, but it seems to be far more challenging than you might think, since many studios and publishers seem to feel that a comic book based on a television series should look like a strung-together series of publicity photos and artographed stills from various episodes of the series.

Like the *Angel* series on WB? Then you're sure to *love* ***Angel Vol 2 #1***. The book's only drawback? It may leave you wishing the teevee series could be this good!

image
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